

# THE RAJA AMPAT ISLANDS

## *In the Heart of the Coral Triangle*

The Raja Ampat or “Four Kings” archipelago encompasses around 4 million hectares of land and sea off the northwestern tip of Indonesia’s West Papua Province. Located in the Coral Triangle, the heart of the world’s coral reef biodiversity, the seas around Raja Ampat possibly hold the richest variety of species in the world. Raja Ampat includes the four large islands of Waigeo, Batanta, Salawati, and Misool, plus hundreds of smaller islands.

The area’s massive coral colonies show that its reefs are resistant to threats like coral bleaching and disease—threats that now jeopardize the survival of corals around the world. In addition, Raja Ampat’s strong ocean currents sweep coral larvae across the Indian and Pacific Oceans to replenish other reef ecosystems. Raja Ampat’s coral diversity, resilience to threats, and ability to replenish reefs make it a global priority for marine protection. The archipelago is part of an area known as the Bird’s Head Seascape, which also contains Cendrawasih Bay, the second largest marine national park in Indonesia, and Jamursba-Medi, housing some of the most important sea turtle nesting beaches in the world.

### **Surveys Confirm Highest Marine Biodiversity on Earth**

In 2002, The Nature Conser-



Bird’s eye view of the karst islands in Misool, Raja Ampat ©Jez O’Hare

vancy (TNC) and its partners conducted a scientific survey of marine ecosystems and coastal forests in the Raja Ampat Islands to document the rich biodiversity in the region. More recent surveys have confirmed 574 species of corals in Raja Ampat—an incredible 75% of all known coral species. In addition there are 1427 reef fish species in the region including endemics found nowhere else on this planet. One of the drivers of this extraordinary biodiversity is the high diversity of habitats ranging from shallow reef habitats which includes fringing, barrier, patch and atoll reefs to deep channels between the main islands. At least 45 marine lakes have been discovered in the region, that

contain unique species of sponge or stingless jellyfish.

Raja Ampat is also an important area for large marine fauna including nesting and foraging populations of green and hawksbill turtles. A total of 17 species of marine mammals including 9 whale species, 7 dolphin species and dugong have been recorded indicating that Raja Ampat is likely to be an important migratory pathway, feeding and/or breeding ground for these species.

Though human impacts here are less severe than elsewhere in Indonesia, Raja Ampat’s natural resources are threatened by overfishing and destructive fishing, poor coastal development, unsustainable logging, and mining.



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## Supporting Policies for Sustainable Resource-Use Management

TNC, working in collaboration with Conservation International Indonesia (CI), supported the Regency Government and the people of Raja Ampat establish six new marine protected areas (MPAs) launched in 2006, making it the first Indonesian regency to declare an MPA network. MPAs, if designed correctly can provide long-term protection of biodiversity, sustain fisheries and ensure long term food and livelihood security for local communities. TNC and partners are currently providing technical assistance to the Government on planning and the management of the MPA network.

TNC and partners are also supporting the development of policies and legislation for areas outside MPAs and regency and provincial-wide spatial planning, to ensure natural resources are not degraded and are wisely managed. Working with partners, the Raja Ampat government was the first regency in 2010 to declare its waters a shark sanctuary, prohibiting the harvesting of sharks, rays, dugong and turtles

within the region. We are now supporting the preparation of legislation to add legal strength to this declaration.

Through surveys and monitoring of reef health, fish populations and patterns of resource use as well as extensive outreach and education activities, TNC provides technical input towards designing zoning systems and management plans for Kofiau and Southeast Misool MPAs that would allow local communities to benefit from their marine resources while ensuring that fish stocks are able to replenish in no-take areas.

The Raja Ampat Government has also issued a decree for a joint patrolling system that involves cross-sectoral divisions of the Government, law enforcers and communities. TNC is supporting this initiative by providing a wooden boat that serves as a Floating Patrol Station for Kofiau and Southeast Misool MPAs to protect the area from illegal marine activities including destructive fishing practices. TNC is also supporting local patrols in the MPAs, encouraging and empowering communities to proactively manage their marine resources.

## Ensuring Conservation through Partnerships

TNC is working in close partnership with the government, communities, NGOs and the private sector to protect Raja Ampat's magnificent reefs while sustaining the livelihoods of local people. In collaboration with CI, TNC is working closely with the Raja Ampat government to develop an innovative governance body and system to manage the MPA network. The Public Services Management Board (BLUD) is the first being developed for MPA networks in Indonesia, and will allow for highly trained professionals, including from NGOs and the private sector, to participate in management as well as allow for funding from both government and non-government sources.

The success of the MPAs will ultimately be dependent upon the level of ownership and capacity within the local MPA managers and regency, provincial and national government agencies responsible for managing the MPA network. To address this issue, a comprehensive three-year MPA managers' capacity building program was launched by TNC, CI and WWF-Indonesia in collaboration with the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA). This program will be linked to a larger national capacity building program and the development of training centers across Indonesia, and includes a comprehensive 'trainer of trainers' program.

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